

Beautiful Blossoms Blooming Bright Are a Delight

by Sharon Smith and Christie Nix, Fairfax Master Gardeners

Can you say that five times fast? When you look around outside on your way to school or when you are outside playing, have you noticed the different colors of flowers in bloom? Isn't it amazing? In early spring, there are daffodils popping up in gardens in different shades of yellow, white and orange. You may also spot a shrub with yellow blossoms called a forsythia bush. For many people, when the daffodils start blooming and the forsythia bush is covered in yellow flowers, it is a sign that spring is here! Once spring gets going, the colors of flowers in the trees, the bushes, and plants in the ground start to pop into full bloom. We will continue to see flowers in bloom throughout the summer and up until the weather gets very cold.

Have you ever wondered why we have flowers? Sure they are beautiful, and many of us enjoy seeing them in our gardens and in pots. I bet you have seen cut flowers in a vase in your home. Flowers are used to celebrate a happy time in our life. For example, you may give flowers to a parent or grandparent on their birthday. If you go to a wedding you will see the bride carrying a bouquet, which means a grouping of flowers tied together, or the groom wearing a single flower called a boutonniere pinned to his jacket.

Flowers give us joy by their color, their smell, their markings like stripes and dots and their beauty. Yet, making us happy is not the reason why we have flowers. Plants have flowers so that they can make more plants through their seeds. Since flowers are the showiest part of a plant, their color, smell and markings are not there for us; they are there to attract pollinators.

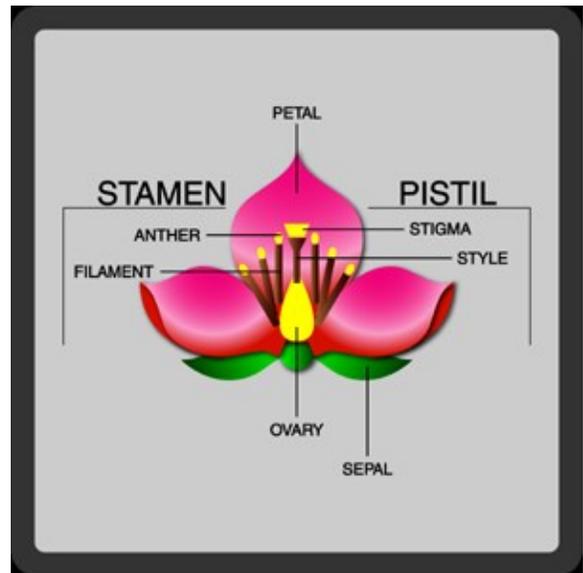


photo: Penn State University York

Flowers are not able to move. For this reason, they must rely on the pollinators (birds, bees, butterflies, bugs, bats and others) to move the pollen created by the male part of a flower called the stamen to the female part called the pistil. You can remember the name of the male part of the flower by looking for the word men in the name. Once a pollinator lands on a flower, it takes the pollen from the male part of the flower to the top of the pistil of the female part of the flower called the stigma.

Since the top of the stigma is sticky and damp, the pollen from the male part of the flower gets trapped and moistened. This helps it eventually make its way down the pistil tube, called the style, to the ovary. When the pollen grains meet up with the eggs called ovules, this process is called fertilization.

I bet you didn't know that after a fertilized flower dies, for example on an apple tree, a fruit with seeds called an apple will start to grow where the flower once was. Animals enjoy eating fruit and after being digested, the seeds will be scattered by their poop. Flowers like the ones you see in home gardens will create just seeds and those seeds will fall to the ground once the flower dies. Whether the seeds are scattered by animals or fall to the ground after the plant dies, you can be sure that by next spring new plants will emerge and the processes of pollination and fertilization will begin again.